Attitudes of stakeholders to animal welfare during slaughter and transport in SE and E Asia

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Abstract

Understanding cross-cultural differences in attitudes to animal welfare issues is important in maintaining good international relations, including economic and trade relations. This study aimed to investigate the attitudes of stakeholders towards improving the welfare of animals during slaughter and transport in four key SE and E Asian countries: China, Thailand, Vietnam and Malaysia. Logistic regression analysis of the associations between demographic factors and attitudes identified nationality as the most significant factor influencing attitude. Motivating factors for improving welfare were ranked according to their importance: religion, knowledge levels, monetary gain, availability of tools and resources, community issues, approval of supervisor and peers. Strong beliefs in the influence of animal welfare laws, the power of the workplace and the importance of personal knowledge were shared by all countries. In addition, religion and peer consideration were significantly associated with attitudes in Malaysia and Thailand, respectively. The findings of this research will assist in the development of international animal welfare initiatives.

Keywords: animal welfare, Asia, attitudes, culture, slaughter, transport

Introduction

The animal agriculture sector is the most economically important interface between humans and other species. It also has the largest number of stakeholders: approximately 68 billion animals are slaughtered for meat globally each year alone (Food and Agriculture Organisation [FAO] 2016), which presents significant potential for animal suffering (Rollin 1995), and it may be considered that for some their lives are ‘not worth living’ (Mellor 2016). The recent growth in meat consumption is greatest in Asia; for example, in China consumption has increased from 10.2 to 13.5 billion animals in the last ten years (FAO 2016). To meet this need, international trade in live animals and animal products has increased (FAO 2016), facilitated by the creation of Fair Trade Agreements, advances in technology and transportation, and the resulting globalised trade. Asia accounts for 39% of global meat production, with China producing almost twice as much meat as the second highest producer — the United States of America (FAO 2016). Although there are major business interests involved in much of the global production of animals, the income of 70% of the world’s poorest people is tied to production animal industries, including many in Asia (World Bank 2016). This is particularly pertinent for trade in animal products between countries in Asia, many of which are exploring animal welfare policy options, and developed countries where there is already advanced animal welfare policy and awareness (Veissier et al 2008). In Europe, which receives many meat animals from Asia, there is an increasing consumer demand for animal products produced in ways that attempt to minimise animal suffering (Verbeke et al 2010).

Many challenges exist in progressing animal welfare in a global context, with great variation in legislation, policy and agricultural landscapes worldwide. It is for this reason that the OIE (World Animal Health Organisation) has developed standards focused on transport and slaughter of production animals and farmed fish (OIE 2011). Based on a scientific understanding of animal welfare and widespread consultation, the OIE Terrestrial and Aquatic Animal Codes have been agreed upon by 180 nations that are signatories to the OIE. It is the responsibility of each country to implement the standards, but there have been some notable instances of lower standards of animal welfare in Asian countries than would be acceptable in developed countries (Tiplady et al 2012).

The ‘Theory of Planned Behaviour’ acknowledges that attitudes are an important predictor of behaviour intentions,